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Ex-CIA chief gives his view of Vietnam War

Few Americans had a longer or more intimate involvement in influencing U.S. policy in Vietnam than William Colby. A former OSS officer who earned his military and intelligence spurs working behind enemy lines with the French resistance and in Norway during World War II, he first came to Vietnam as the CIA's man in Saigon in 1959. During the next 16 years, Mr. Colby headed the CIA's Far East Division in Washington, returned to Vietnam to run the various American "people's war" pacification programs and, in 1973, became CIA director.

Mr. Colby is widely regarded as an extremely intelligent, dedicated, courageous man who worked diligently and selflessly to implement U.S. policy in Vietnam. "Lost Victory" combines his first-hand experiences with an analysis of what went wrong for the United States in Vietnam.

The valuable sections of "Lost Victory" are Mr. Colby's personal observations of the war's main players. They include in-depth looks at a host of Vietnamese political and military leaders, most important South Vietnam's first president, Ngo Dinh Diem, and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, and that nation's last president, Nguyen Van Thieu. Mr. Colby also offers intimate portraits of virtually all the top U.S. players, from presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford, on down to CIA operatives in the field.

Near the end of the book Mr. Colby says that his purpose is "not to engage in casting blame or in justifying self." That may not be the purpose, but throughout this moderately long and detailed book Mr. Colby does his share of finger-pointing. First place on his blame list goes to the Vietnamese communists, primarily those in the North. But not

Lost Victory.
 William Colby with James McCargar.
 Contemporary Books.
 438 pages. \$22.95.

far behind are those in South Vietnam and in the United States who did not support Mr. Colby's ideas about how to win that war. He believed that the way to defeat the communists was not to send in the Marines, but to help make the government of South Vietnam responsive to the needs of its people, and thereby make the government an attractive alternative to the communists.

Mr. Colby believed that President Diem and his brother and close adviser Nhu were perfectly suited to wage a people's war against the communists. In "Lost Victory," he strongly criticizes those who opposed the Ngo brothers, including the "urbane educated elite" of South Vietnam who refused to support their regime. In doing so, Mr. Colby glosses over the Diem government's hard-right brand of authoritarianism, which featured brutal repression and occupation that permeated all levels of the closely run government and military.

Then there's Mr. Colby's bashing of the U.S. media and the anti-war movement. "Certainly, there was no conspiracy by the press to present a false picture to the American people," Mr. Colby writes. But after saying that, he proceeds to pepper his book with charges that some American correspondents were little more than dupes of the Vietnamese communists. In 1972, for example, during the Paris peace talks, Mr. Colby slams the monolithic "American me-

dia" for "providing the American public with a rich diet of stories of the failures and imperfections of the South Vietnamese regime and little or nothing about North Vietnam beyond the image Hanoi wished others to see." With this and other generalizations Mr. Colby does a severe disservice to the overwhelming majority of U.S. correspondents who reported accurately and objectively about the war.

He also is less than charitable to the anti-war movement, which he variously calls "hysterical," simplistic and concerned with making "political capital." Again, he uses the actions of a small minority (those far left-wingers who actually wanted the communists to win) to tarnish the efforts of an overwhelming majority. His comments unfairly denigrate millions of Americans who protested against the Vietnam War for reasons that had nothing to do with politics and were far from being hysterical or simplistic.

This unfair assault on the media and anti-war movement (as well as Mr. Colby's misguided blaming of Congress for North Vietnam's final victory) tarnishes "Lost Victory." That is unfortunate because his central idea is a sound one. The "penultimate major error of the Americans in Vietnam," Mr. Colby says, was "insisting upon fighting an American-style military war against an enemy who, through the early years of the war, was fighting his style of people's war at the level of the population." It's hard to argue with that.

—MARC LEEPSON

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